



What is Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)?

Adult ADHD is a neurological brain disorder that presents itself as a **persistent pattern of inattention and hyperactivity/impulsivity** that is more frequent and severe than is typically observed in individuals at the same level of mental development.

ADHD (which usually begins with **ADHD** in childhood) has only recently been investigated. While **some teens outgrow ADHD** as they get older, about 60 percent continue to have symptoms late into adulthood.

ADHD is not specifically classified as a learning disorder, but can cause **severe learning difficulties in adults and teens**.

The Difference Between ADD and ADHD

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) is the umbrella disorder, encompassing three sub-groups. These three groups are defined as follows:

- **ADD Inattentive Type**
Teens and adults with this disorder are not overly active. They **do not disrupt** the classroom/office, so their symptoms might not be noticed. Their main difficulty is the **inability to focus and concentrate**. In teen girls, this sub-group of ADD is the most common.
- **ADD Hyperactive/Impulsive Type**
In this sub-group of ADD, rarely adults exhibit only hyperactivity/impulsivity symptoms. This is classified as **ADHD**, as it includes the element of **hyperactivity**.
- **ADD Combined Type**
Teens and adults with this type of ADD show **hyperactive behavior** (starting in childhood), **impulsive behavior**, and **cannot focus or concentrate**. Hyperactivity symptoms tend to be less noticeable in adults. This is classified as **ADHD** as it includes the element of hyperactivity, and is the **most common form of ADHD**.

How Does ADHD Manifest in Adults?

ADHD in adults manifests differently than **ADHD** in children, as **hyperactivity tends to decrease with age** (for some but not all).

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Although the exact prevalence in adults is unknown, studies thus far reveal that the condition probably exists in about 2 to 4 percent of adults, and is marked by the inability to maintain concentration, difficulty getting work done, procrastination, and organization problems.

A person's inability to focus, sit still, concentrate, or follow instructions can **greatly impair academic development** or **negatively affect their professional career**.

Developing **self-regulation is the biggest problem** adults face when they have [ADHD](#). This is often not expected of young children but is expected of adults. This self control affects an adult's ability not just to perform tasks, but to determine when they need to be done.

Individuals with [ADHD](#) have **difficulty with certain brain activity**, particularly in the area that is responsible for monitoring the behaviors that control planning and organization. This can be extremely frustrating to the [ADHD](#) adult.

When combined with [ADHD](#), other learning disabilities can **cause extreme frustration for adults or teens** struggling at college or in the workplace. A few symptoms, such as disorganization, weak executive functioning, and inefficient use of strategies can be seen in ADD, [ADHD](#), and other learning disabilities.

Although learning disabilities are common in adolescents with [ADHD](#), **they do not affect intelligence**. People with [ADHD](#) span the same IQ range as the general population.

Diagnosing ADHD in Adults

How is ADHD Diagnosed?

The diagnostic principles used for [ADHD](#) in adults and teens are identical to those for diagnosing [ADHD](#) in children. It is important to establish whether the adult **[ADHD symptoms](#) were also present in childhood**, even if they were not previously recognized.

Steps in Making the ADHD Diagnosis

As with [ADHD](#) in children, the **diagnosis is controversial** and has been questioned by some professionals, adults diagnosed with [ADHD](#), and parents of diagnosed teens.

They point out the potentially positive behaviors that some adults with [ADHD](#) have, such as hyperfocus. Others believe [ADHD](#) is a different form of human behavior and use the term *neurodiversity* to describe it.

Further, **critics suspect ulterior motives of the medical industry**, which authorizes the definitions of mental disorders and promotes the use of pharmaceutical drugs for their treatment. These are just some of the aspects making diagnosis of [ADHD](#) highly controversial.



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Michele Carelse, Clinical Psychologist



All of our natural remedies are formulated by our expert team of herbalists, naturopaths and homeopaths, and headed by Michele Carelse.

Michele has had years of experience in the manufacturing and use of natural remedies. In addition, she is a trained Clinical Psychologist and has been incorporating natural remedies into her treatment of patients with depression, anxiety, ADD, ADHD and stress for many years with spectacular results.

Symptoms should be observed in multiple settings such as university, home, work, etc.

Adults (including teens) seeking a possible diagnosis can provide their own history, input, and insight and make the process much easier than in the case of very small children. Adults and teens can vocalize exactly what they feel and put into words the chaos sometimes felt inside. **Adults are more likely than teens to realize that they might have [ADHD](#).** However, it is still very important to seek a thorough evaluation and professional diagnosis.

The process of **diagnosing [ADHD](#) must be comprehensive.** It requires several steps and involves gathering a multitude of information from multiple sources.

Under no circumstances should [ADHD](#) be diagnosed in any individual whose primary diagnosis is an emotional disorder, such as anxiety or depression.

Your health care professional/psychologist should investigate the following areas:

- School history and school reports (looking for specific problems beginning as early as possible that may have been encountered during development)
- Sibling relationships
- Family history (for any occurrence of [ADHD](#))
- Eating habits
- Sleep patterns
- Medical problems (physical problems, particularly allergies)

Your health professional/psychologist will want to know how you handle different situations and may want to **observe certain activities and interactions.** In addition to looking at behavior, they may do a **physical examination.**

A full medical history will be needed to put your behavior in context and screen for other conditions that may affect your behavior. Your health care professional/psychologist will also want to talk to you about your feelings and 'typical' actions during the course of a routine day.

You will more than likely be asked to provide crucial information about your life at home, behavior in college/work, and in other social settings. Your health care professional/psychologist will want to know what symptoms you have, how long the symptoms have occurred, and how the behavior affects you and your family.

Other signs or symptoms may be identified, warranting blood tests, brain imaging studies, or an EEG. Blood or other laboratory tests are currently recommended only if your psychologist/health care professional suspects lead toxicity or other medical problems.

Recognizing the Symptoms of ADHD

Described by an author with [ADHD](#):

"...It's like being super-charged all the time. You get one idea and you have to act on it, and then, what do you know, but you've got another idea before you've finished up with the first one. You then go for that

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one, but of course a third idea intercepts the second, and you just have to follow that one. Pretty soon people are calling you disorganized, impulsive, and all sorts of impolite words that miss the point completely. Because you're trying really hard. It's just that you have all these invisible vectors pulling you this way and that, which makes it really hard to stay on task."

It is important to keep in mind that there may be no "impairment" in your life, and you could be fully functional. The **characteristics of adult ADHD affect each individual differently**. Inattention and memory characteristics include the following:

- May be forgetful in daily activities
- May consistently begin a task and not complete it
- May have a problem following conversations.
- May be difficult to motivate yourself to begin a project
- May have difficulty following a timed schedule
- May be in constant movement
- May get bored easily
- May become restless after a few minutes of inactivity
- May have a great desire for active, risky and fast paced activities

Adult ADHD symptoms are not distinct, clear physical signs that can be seen in an X-ray or show up on a lab test. They **can only be identified by looking for certain characteristic behaviors** (which vary from person to person) and by examining the history.

There are several symptoms for ADHD that seem to get worse when demands at school, college, work or home increase. They are:

- Not listening to instructions
- Inability to get organized
- Fidgeting, especially with the hands and feet
- Talking too much
- Failure to finish projects, including work assignments
- Difficulty paying attention to and responding to details

What Causes ADHD in Adults?

One of the first questions you may have after being diagnosed with adult ADHD is "Why is this affecting me? What went wrong?" or "Did I do something to cause this?"

When correctly diagnosed, there is **little evidence that ADD can arise purely from social factors or environment**. Knowing this can remove a huge burden of guilt from family members or partners who might blame themselves for the individual's behavior.

Researchers suspect that there are several factors that may contribute to the condition, including:

- **Heredity and genetics.** The fact that ADHD tends to run in families suggests that children may inherit a genetic tendency to develop an



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- attention-deficit disorder from their parents.
- **Chemical imbalance.** People who have [ADHD](#) may not be able to produce enough chemicals in key areas of the brain that are responsible for organizing thought.
- **Brain changes.** Areas of the brain that control attention are less active in adults with [ADHD](#) than in people without the disorder.

Myths Surrounding the Causes of ADHD

Although the following factors may present symptoms similar to those of [ADHD](#), research has shown that there is **no evidence that [ADHD](#) is caused by the following:**

- Immunizations
- Too much TV
- Poor home life
- Poor schools or colleges
- Bad parenting
- Aspartame (or sugar substitutes)
- Lack of vitamins
- Fluorescent lights
- Video games

However, in some cases, the above factors **could certainly cause symptoms similar** to those seen with ADD in certain individuals. It is worth investigating their impact if a link is suspected.

Help for Adults with ADHD

ADD is often treated using conventional prescription medications. While there is a place for prescription medication in certain cases of ADD, **careful consideration should be taken** regarding possible side effects and cautions.

There are also **alternative solutions for ADD and [ADHD](#)** available. Making simple changes in diet, sleep, exercise, and routine can help. Even trying more involved approaches like **incorporating relaxation therapies** such as guided imagery, meditation techniques, or yoga can be beneficial.

There are also many **herbal and homeopathic remedies** which can help maintain harmony, health, and systemic balance in the brain and nervous system, without side effects or sedation. These products are **known for their supportive function** in maintaining brain, nervous system and circulatory health, and well-being, while **reducing or eliminating** adult [ADHD symptoms](#).

Who is Likely to Suffer from Adult ADHD?

Although the exact prevalence in adults is unknown, studies so far reveal that the condition, marked by inability to concentrate, having difficulty getting work done, procrastination, or organization problems, probably **exists in about 2 to 4 percent of adults**.

- **School-Related Impairments Linked to [adult ADHD](#)**

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Adults with **ADHD** may have had:

- A history of poor educational performance, thus a strong likelihood of underachievement
- More frequent school disciplinary actions
- May have repeated a grade
- May have dropped out of school

• **Work-Related Impairments Linked to Adult ADHD**

Adults with **ADHD** are more likely to:

- Change employers frequently and perform at less than optimal levels
- Have had fewer occupational achievements, independent of psychiatric status

• **Social-Related Impairments Linked to Adult ADHD**

Adults with **ADHD** are more likely to:

- Have a lower socioeconomic status
- Have driving violations such as: speeding tickets, suspended license, car accidents, and/or a record of poor driving
- Use illegal substances more frequently
- Smoke cigarettes
- Self-report psychological maladjustment more often

• **Relationship-Related Impairments Linked to Adult ADHD**

Adults with **ADHD** are more likely to:

- Have more marital problems and multiple marriages
- Have higher incidence of separation and divorce

Remember that every individual is unique, and just because you may have been diagnosed with ADD does not mean you will automatically experience or exhibit these behaviors.

Symptoms Indicating Something Other than ADHD

Many symptoms and behaviors can present themselves as symptoms of **ADHD**. These include:

- Underachievement at college/work due to a learning disability (eg. dyslexia)
- Attention lapses caused by petit mal seizures, also known as absence seizures
- Concentration and learning difficulties due to a sleep disorder or breathing problems
- Disruptive or unresponsive behavior due to physical abuse
- Disruptive or unresponsive behavior due to a family member or partner's substance abuse or dependency on alcohol
- Attention-seeking behavior due to family or partner's lack of interest
- A sudden life change
- Substance abuse
- Medical disorders affecting brain function
- Incorrect level of schooling or incorrect placement at work
- Chronic fear due to a traumatic event
- Disruptive or unresponsive behavior due to anxiety or depression

*Under no circumstances should ADD or **ADHD** be diagnosed in any individual whose primary diagnosis is an emotional disorder, such as anxiety or depression.*

It's very important that individuals are thoroughly evaluated and an in-depth

history is investigated before the conclusion of adult [ADHD](#) is reached.

Other causes of [ADHD](#) type symptoms are food intolerance, hypoglycemia (low blood sugar), allergies, perceptual difficulties, nutritional problems, candida, hyperthyroidism, Tourette's syndrome, brain dysfunction, family and emotional problems, poor discipline, anxiety, depression, and other conditions. Each of these problems would require different treatment and may even be exacerbated by prescription medication for [ADHD](#).

If **other areas are determined to be a possible root cause** of the behavior, the diagnosis of [ADHD](#) **must** be put on hold until these areas are fully explored.

These include:

- Mental retardation
- Chronic illness being treated with a medication that may interfere with learning
- Trouble seeing and/or hearing
- History of abuse
- Major anxiety or major depression
- Severe aggression
- Possible seizure disorder
- Alcohol or drug abuse

Managing ADHD in Adults and Teens

You need to be proactive and take initiative to find the best possible treatment plan. Be positive. Here are a few tips.

- **Tips for you as an [ADHD](#) Adult:**

- Set aside a few minutes each night to schedule the following day's events
- Organize needed everyday items so you know where things are
- Use diaries and notebook organizers
- Don't be too hard on yourself or set unrealistic goals

- **Activities to Pursue:**

While there is no single activity that guarantees teens with ADD/[ADHD](#) instant success, certain types of activities tend to reap more positive results.

- Look for activities with a singular focus, such as sports that center attention
- Consider activities that involve movement, providing an appropriate and controlled physical outlet
- Learn to play a musical instrument
- Seek activities that offer individualized instruction
- Explore activities that result in tangible rewards

- **Activities to Avoid:**

- Involve a lot of down time
- Require too much divided attention
- Require fine motor skills

Special Advice for Managing Teens with [ADHD](#)

Tips for you as a parent to help your ADD teen:

- Maintain as much routine and consistency as possible
- Try to avoid major or frequent changes
- Ensure that family relationships are stable
- Be very consistent in your discipline and keep all rules the same
- Speak often to your teen's teachers
- Engage in activities that promote concentration and listening skills
- Use frequent eye contact when speaking to your teen or giving instructions
- Keep directions simple and set simple house rules
- Provide a structured outlet for hyperactivity
- Teach using as many of the senses as possible and make learning interactive
- Review your expectations for your teen
- Reward positive behavior immediately
- Anticipate situations
- Make sure your teen is supervised at all times
- Learn and understand the symptoms of ADD
- Schedule tasks and reminders
- Organize needed everyday items
- Use homework and notebook organizers
- Set a homework routine
- Focus on effort, not grades
- Make a special effort to highlight positives in your child

Try not to:

- Use physical punishment
- Put too many expectations on your teen
- Focus too much on the areas your teen is struggling with

Prescription Treatments for ADHD in Adults

No comprehensive discussion of attention deficit hyperactivity is possible without considering the benefits and disadvantages of prescription drugs - a subject fraught with controversy.

The Controversy

Ritalin and the other [ADHD](#) stimulant medications have sparked a great deal of controversy. Often seen as an easy 'quick fix' they are **prescribed to treat symptoms but not the underlying cause** of [ADHD](#).

Often people feel that by researching alternatives to prescribed drugs, they are in some way neglecting their teen or loved one, and endangering their health. Ironically, **side effects of these prescription drugs can seriously endanger a person's health.**

In fact, **investigating the possible side effects and long-term impact** of prescription drugs is almost certainly viewed as an act of love. Educating yourself on each of the prescription drugs used to treat [ADHD](#) is a necessity if you want to provide the safest treatment for yourself or for those you love.

There are some difficulties in using stimulants to treat [ADHD](#) in adults. Stimulants are controlled substances, and it is not uncommon for adults (including teens) with [ADHD](#) to have or to have had problems with substance abuse.

Short-acting stimulants may wear off quickly, and since adult patients administer the medication themselves but usually have problems with forgetfulness, **consistency can be problematic** with multiple-day dosing.

Adults may experience significant difficulty in the evening when they do housework, pay bills, help children with homework, or drive. They may be tempted to use substances 'to relax', which can lead to **addiction and drug-dependency**. Teens may sell their medication to friends, or combine it with other substances.

[ADHD](#) represents a **growing market for pharmaceutical companies**.

Although psycho-stimulants may be helpful for many families, no one should underestimate the influence of the economic issues involved.

It is also a worry to note that the **long-term effects of prescription drugs** for the treatment of [ADHD](#) **have not been determined**. For this reason, treatment of ADHD with prescription drugs or stimulant drugs should be regarded a last resort when all other avenues have been exhausted.

Long-Term Complications

Research into the long-term effects of Ritalin and other drugs prescribed for [ADHD](#) is still in its early stages. More research is needed.

Discuss with your doctor the risks and benefits of using these medications or treating your teen with these medications.

It is strongly advised that the following criteria are fully investigated with regards to any stimulant drugs: common uses, cautions, possible side effects, overdose, additional information, and major drug interactions.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are still investigating certain side effects of certain prescription [ADHD](#) drugs, and it is advisable that individuals do their own research into these medications so that they are fully aware of the potential risks.

Other Considerations

Physicians still have a difficult time predicting which prescription medications will produce beneficial results, so **treatment is individualized and performed on a trial and error basis**. This 'hit or miss' technique requires close observation and cooperation between all participants, and is understandably not the best solution.

If an initial regimen doesn't work, doctors often change the dosage, switch to a different drug, or even add another medication. Some doctors even recommend trying a second psycho-stimulant if a first one does not work. If the individual still doesn't respond, antidepressants or other second-line drugs may be prescribed.

Before long, a **person may be taking a cocktail of drugs** to treat the side effects of the initial medication, thus creating a domino effect.

Remember, **medications don't cure adult ADHD**, they only control the symptoms on the day they are taken. Although the medications may help the individual pay better attention and complete work, they can't increase knowledge or improve academic skills.

The medications can only help the individual to use those skills he or she already possesses, which may just as easily be obtained through behavioral therapy and other proactive techniques, such as 'out of the box' creative methods.

It is vital that you educate yourself on all aspects of [ADHD](#) before making a decision regarding prescription drugs.

Other Treatment Options for Adults with ADHD

For people with [ADHD](#), **no single treatment is the answer for everyone**. A person may have undesirable side effects to a medication, making a particular treatment unacceptable. Each person's needs and personal history must be carefully considered. It is **important to work with a health care professional/psychologist** to determine the safest treatment.

If all other options and avenues have been investigated and prescription drugs are chosen for treatment, frequent follow-up visits should be scheduled to assess the response and to detect possible side effects. Teens on medications should have regular checkups.

Stimulants are not a cure-all, and adults should be informed of healthy choices with regards to food, exercise, and healthy hobbies. The best chance of minimizing side effects is to **use a remedy that is free of adverse or unwanted secondary effects** completely.

Alternative Treatments

- **Herbal and Homeopathic Remedies** - A number of adults have tried natural remedies as an alternative to psycho-stimulants and other drugs. Small trials have found some agents, such as oral flower essence, Ginkgo biloba, Panax ginseng, and melatonin may possibly have benefits for [ADHD](#). There are homeopathic remedies which effectively target some of the disruptive symptoms of [ADHD](#) and allow the child to concentrate more easily.

Natural remedies should be considered as a first step ahead of prescription psychiatric drugs. When combined with strong dietary control, counseling (as necessary), and a healthy lifestyle, **natural remedies have been show to be effective** in helping to alleviate the symptoms of [ADHD](#).

- **Dietary Approaches**. A number of diets have been suggested for people with [ADHD](#). Various studies have reported behavioral improvement with diets that **restrict possible allergens** in the diet. Parents may want to discuss with their health care professional, homeopath, or naturopath concerning **implementing an elimination diet of certain foods or**

adding supplements that would not be harmful and that might help. This is a very individualized approach and would differ from child to child. Always consult a nutritional expert before restricting your diet.

- **Feedback Approaches.** A technique that uses auditory (sound) feedback may prove to be an effective tool for increasing attention.
- **Neurofeedback.** This technique uses electronic devices to help control brain wave activity.
- **Interactive Metronome and Musical Therapy.** Feedback from sound is used to improve attention, motor control, and certain academic skills.
- **Massage and Relaxation Techniques.** Massage therapy can help [ADHD](#) adults feel more relaxed, fidget less, be less hyperactive, and focus on tasks. Other methods include reflexology, relaxation training, meditation, and music therapy.

The Natural Approach

While Western medicine has become the norm in many cultures, it is not the only treatment option. Conventional western medicine, often called allopathic medicine, is the system of medicine taught at most medical schools and most pharmaceutical and synthetic medicines are manufactured and marketed according to the principles of allopathic medicine. Allopathic medicine is also sometimes called orthodox medicine.

Because most of us in the Western world have grown up in a society in which allopathic medicine is the prevailing norm, we forget that, only a few decades ago, homeopathic, herbal and other natural medicines were commonly available – and freely used even by conventional doctors. While there are often heated debates about which system of medicine is ‘better’ than the other, many responsible doctors (whether they are allopathic or not) recognize that both have a role to play in the treatment program.

Natural medicine has often been frowned on by conventional doctors, especially by those who did not have sufficient knowledge of these medicines. However, it is encouraging to note that some medical schools are now beginning to re-introduce it into their course work, thereby providing doctors with a wider range of treatment options from which to choose. In many countries, especially in Europe, India and China, natural and homeopathic medicines are commonly prescribed by conventional doctors and represent a significant part of the total annual drug sales.

Naturopathy is a branch of medicine (just as allopathy is a branch of medicine) which operates according to the underlying philosophy that the body has an innate capacity to heal itself. While natural medicines are often called ‘alternative’ or ‘complimentary’ medicines, they are, in fact, a unique and independent form of medicine in their own right, well able to treat a variety of conditions. Perhaps the term ‘holistic’ medicine is more apt, given the broad range of treatment options and approaches which are to be found within the practice of natural medicine, which encompasses many different disciplines, including herbalism, homeopathy, iridology, osteopathy, chiropractic, therapeutic massage techniques, aromatherapy, acupuncture and many, many more.

Most naturopaths will use a variety of treatment modalities in order to treat their

patients in a holistic way to support health, relieve symptoms and prevent future disease. In fact, even the World Health Organization defines health as being "... more than simply the absence of illness. It is the active state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being." This is a wonderfully clear description of holistic or natural medicine, which strives to support health (thereby relieving or preventing symptoms), rather than simply eliminating disease.

Although allopathic medicine certainly has a role to play and has made a tremendous contribution to medical science during the past century, there is a growing perception that it is not the only answer and that, in many cases, holistic medicine can accomplish just as much, if not more – without the risk of side effects, addiction and sacrifice to health so commonly associated with pharmaceutical drugs. Contrary to common perception, and provided that they are manufactured in the correct way, natural medicines can work quickly and safely to promote healing.

In many cases, they can succeed where pharmaceutical drugs have failed. Despite frequent reports that they are ‘unproven’ and ‘untested’, the opposite is true. Natural medicines have a long history of usage and there is a wealth of empirical evidence to support their effectiveness and safety. In addition, active clinical research is carried out by many academic hospitals and universities to support the extensive traditional and empirical evidence behind natural medicines.

It is also important to know that, like any medicine, herbal and homeopathic medicines must be manufactured in the correct way, following acceptable procedures and manufacturing methods to ensure maximum effectiveness and safety. Due to the recent rise in popularity of natural remedies, many companies have sprung up to take advantage of the market. Unfortunately not all of them are equipped to manufacture to the correct standards, often resulting in a flood of inferior (and sometimes even unsafe) remedies onto the market – and giving natural remedies a bad name.

Even some pharmaceutical companies have rushed to claim their market share by producing so-called ‘standardized’ extracts of herbs and offering these as superior to the tried and tested methods of naturopathic manufacturing. Nothing could be further from the truth. While ‘standardized’ extracts may offer benefit of easy consistency of dosage (and cheaper more efficient production lines), they have grave disadvantages. These include an increase in side effects as the medicines produced in this manner lose the natural protective properties of the herbs. In some cases, these side effects have proved fatal – as was seen in the liver toxicity associated with standardized extracts of kava kava, a herb previously safely used for generations without any known side effects.

Most naturopaths recommend what is called the Full Spectrum Method of extraction – which retains the benefits of ALL the active ingredients within the herb as opposed to isolating only one – thereby providing a more complete treatment as well as superior protection against side effects.

Whatever your choice, always choose wisely. Research what is best for you. If you have a chronic or life threatening condition, don't make changes without first discussing them with your doctor in order that your condition may be monitored. Well informed and supportive practitioners will support patients who want to take responsibility for their own health.

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